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A BAD BEGINNING

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY

ERNEST GRANT WHITE

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18 Vesey Street, New York

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BY

ERNEST GRANT WHITE

Author of "The Scribe," "That Letter," etc.

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18 Vesey Street New York

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A BAD BEGINNING

CHARACTERS

STEPHEN PURCEVAL.....*A ranchman from Nevada*
ANNE PENNINGTON.....*A New York society girl*
JANET COWDREY.....*Also in New York society*
FRANK BELL.....*An engineer and man-about-town*
JACK HOWARD.....*A victim of the tender passion*
BELL-BOY.....*A necessary evil*

TIME.—Spring, 1919.

LOCALITY.—Purceval's suite, hotel McLaren, New York City, N. Y.

TIME OF REPRESENTATION.—About one hour.

SYNOPSIS

STEPHEN PURCEVAL, a Nevada ranchman (formerly a New Yorker), comes to the metropolis expecting to marry JANET COWDREY, a society girl. She has been flirting with him but, however, "turns him down cold." Disgusted, he proposes to return to the West immediately, but at this time ANNE PENNINGTON, another society girl, enters his suite at the hotel. PURCEVAL assumes that she is a thief and engages her in conversation while deciding what disposition to make of her. He becomes interested and loses his heart to her "on the rebound," as it were. To his proposal of marriage she replies evasively, though deeply impressed, and leaves, giving him some hope, however.

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JACK HOWARD, a boy friend and admirer of ANNE, now enters and complicates the situation by attempting to force an explanation from PURCEVAL as to ANNE'S presence in his rooms. He is only partially successful but does succeed in establishing ANNE'S identity and PURCEVAL'S honorable intentions.

Later, ANNE returns in company with FRANK BELL, an old friend of PURCEVAL and a business associate of her father. BELL is engaged to JANET and she follows ANNE and him to the hotel. A stormy interview follows, during which JANET'S discomfiture is made complete, JACK contributing in no small degree to this end. ANNE accepts PURCEVAL and again—"A bad beginning makes a good ending."

COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

PURCEVAL, Age 40, evening dress and bath robe.

ANNE, Age 24, street costume, hat, gloves, etc.

JANET, Age 25, evening costume, hat, gloves, etc.

BELL, Age 40, evening dress throughout, with hat and overcoat.

JACK, Age 19, street dress with hat.

BELL-BOY, Age 17, uniform with visorless cap.

INCIDENTAL PROPERTIES

Gladstone bag, small tray, wash cloth, towel, military brushes, watch and fob, fountain pen, note for PURCEVAL; note and hand-bag for ANNE; check book, deeds, time-tables, etc.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

As seen by a performer on the stage facing the audience, R. means right hand; L., left hand; C., center; D. C., door in center of rear flat; D. L., door at left. UP means toward back of stage; DOWN, toward footlights.

FOREWORD

The author in writing this play had in mind the needs and requirements of the amateur stage and has tried to meet both. He has produced it with an amateur company several times and knows from experience that the audiences approve of it. The one setting required can be readily and inexpensively obtained and the same is true of costumes and properties.

Full directions will be found for everything required.

The scope of action is well within the limits of the average intelligent, "serious, amateur company and the author gives his Godspeed to those who may wish to use the play, hoping that they and their audiences will enjoy it.

E. G. W.

New York, September 1, 1919.

A BAD BEGINNING

SCENE.—*Sitting-room of suite. Practical doors at c. and L. Dresser against wall R. Costumer near dresser; table DOWN L. Arm and other chairs disposed about stage. Waste-basket UP L. Carpet on stage. Telephone at L. of door c. (To be operated from prompter's position.) Lights full up during whole play. DISCOVERED at rise, STEPHEN seated in armchair DOWN L. reading letter; his coat is off.*

STEPHEN (*thinking—a pause*). Funny she should want to come here. (*Reading*) “Dear Steve: Your letter was a distinct surprise. Imagine the shock to hear you were in New York, a pleasant one of course. You say you want to come up to see me. You know I should be perfectly delighted to have you come, but there is something that prevents it; I will explain when I see you. I have decided to come to you instead, for I must see you at once. Shall be at your hotel at eight o'clock. In haste, Janet.” (*Musing*) Now why the devil can't I go to her home? (*Thinking*) Perhaps she's afraid I'd disgrace her with my rough ways; poor kid, she will be surprised to know that I have stacked up against the society game before, in the first person singular. I suppose there is a sight of difference between a swallow-tail and chaps to some people, but after an intimate acquaintance with both outfits, give me the chaps. (*Telephone rings*) Maybe that's Janet now. (*Grabs coat and puts it on, smoothing hair and tidying up. Bell rings again*) I'll bet that's her, she's kind of impatient. (*Goes to 'phone*) Hello—yes, this is him, send her right up—what?—it isn't a her—who?—oh, Mr. Frank Bell—send

him along. (*Hangs up disappointedly*) Frank Bell; it's years since I've seen him; we used to be great buddies. I shall be glad to see him but I wish he had selected a more propitious time to call. (*Looks at watch, shakes head*) Seven-forty—in twenty minutes she will be here; I must shoot Frank out before she arrives. (*Knock at D. C.*) Come in.

ENTER BELL D. C.

BELL (*hand extended*). Steve!

STEVE (*grasping BELL'S hand*). Frank, well, well, this is a surprise. (*Looking BELL over*) Say, Buck, you don't look a day older than when we used to chum at the Lotus Club.

BELL. Now, Steve, that's nice of you, even though I know it isn't true. Look at these. (*Points to gray hair at temples*)

STEVE. I've got you beaten there, old man.

BELL. So you have; but you know you were much more pious than I in the old days; no doubt that accounts for it.

STEVE (*laughs*). Pious! (*Takes BELL'S hat, motions to seat*) We certainly were a pious pair, Frank; we sought much spiritual refreshment, didn't we? (*Hangs BELL'S hat on costumer*)

BELL. *Spirituous*, you mean; and then you broke away from it all and cleared out; goodness knows where you went.

STEVE (*sitting at table*). Oh, I was sick of it all, Frank; sick of the sham and show and dissipation; there was nothing real about it aside from you, old pal.

BELL. And yet you cleared out and left me.

STEVE. But not before I had asked you to go too; you hadn't gotten enough, however.

BELL. No, not then.

STEVE. Then you did get it later?

BELL. Plenteously, Steve, plenteously. I sunk very nearly all I had before I did though.

STEVE. And then?

BELL. I tried to locate you. You had written me several times, but I was too busy to answer and when I got my fill, I couldn't find you; where did you go?

STEVE. I went West. I tried several occupations only to find that I was unfitted for any. Finally I went to a sanatorium and told the doctors to tinker me into as good shape as the material would permit. It was a tough job for I had left mighty little to work on, but eventually they turned me loose in a fairly good physical condition, and with some good advice.

BELL. Did you take it?

STEVE. Yes, that was the only thing I got gratuitously. I just forgot as far as possible that New York and I had ever been acquainted, went to work on a ranch and made good.

BELL. Now I suppose you own the ranch you started on?

STEVE. No, not that one, I am superintendent there; but I invested money in several other properties and have recovered the patrimony I wasted besides something over.

BELL. Bully for you. Our experiences have been much the same. When I couldn't find you, I took up the dropped ends of my early attempts at engineering and finally located with a mining company in Yucatan. I made good also and with the money I had left, invested in the work, finally became an officer of the company. I have now given up roughing it and come back to civilization.

STEVE. Fine, Frank, fine; all except the last; this life here is not civilization, it is centralization. You should live among the real people that I know. *There* a man is judged fairly, by what he wears, inside.

BELL (*pointing to STEVE'S clothes*). But I see you are wearing —

STEVE. Yes, but I am among the Romans *now*. I am going to try to get sufficient capital to develop a mining property that has come into my possession, and I didn't

think it the thing to go about the city in my ranch togs; besides, Frank, we are fairly up to date now, even on the ranch, and wear collars and neck-ties and all that, *sometimes*.

BELL. Have you taken up the mining matter with any one yet?

STEVE. Not yet, but I have tried to see a man named Pennington, whom my banker recommended.

BELL. Sherwood Pennington?

STEVE. That's right, do you know him?

BELL. Well, rather; he is the president of my company. Let's get at this thing. (*Moves up chair, interestedly*)

STEVE (*glancing at watch*). Yes, yes, of course, that is—(*Gets BELL's hat*) Say, Frank, I have a most important engagement, which the joy of seeing you had nearly driven out of my head. I expect her here—(*Hands hat to BELL, gets his own*)

BELL (*interrupting*). Her? Here? So —

STEVE (*confused*). No, no, you don't understand, the *her* is my mine, the Janet, and —

BELL. The Janet?

STEVE. Yes, do you know her,—I mean it?

BELL (*laughing*). Whichever you wish, old man, I hope some day to acquire an interest.

STEVE (*absently, looking at watch*). Yes, yes, so do I—but I must run along; I will be late. (*Putting on hat*) Let's go down and get a drink.

BELL (*rising slowly*). Thought you had quit drinking.

STEVE (*going*). So I have, that is—intoxicants, but I'm a middling heavy smoker, so come on; we can visit a little down stairs. [EXIT D. C.]

BELL. He certainly is changed from the old Steve. [EXIT D. C. *shakes head*]

RE-ENTER STEVE D. C. *Closes door carefully. Tip-toes to 'phone.*

STEVE. Hello—if a lady calls to see Mr. Purceval,

show her up to my sitting-room and leave the door open—that's right. (*Mopping face*) Whew! (EXIT hurriedly D. C. Telephone rings three times—Pause—Another ring—Pause)

ENTER BELL-BOY D. C., followed by JANET and JACK.

BOY. Mr. Purceval will soon be back.

[EXIT D. C., leaving door open

JANET. Close the door, please.

BOY (*returning*). Mr. Purceval's orders, leave the door open.

JANET. The idea!—well, never mind.

[EXIT BOY D. C.

JACK. Shall I close it? (*Goes toward D. C.*)

JANET. Never mind. (*Imitating boy*) Mr. Purceval's orders. (*Laughs*)

JACK. But why should he give any such order?

JANET. You dear boy, you don't know Stephen; these are his rooms, and I am ——

JACK. I see; pretty fine sentiment that.

JANET (*indifferently*). Oh, yes, he has excellent principles and all that, but ——

JACK. But what?

JANET. Oh, I don't know, he is a nice little fellow, a trifle rough and unrefined, but he really has a fine character.

JACK. Then why do you wish to be rid of him? Surely those attributes should recommend him.

JANET. Jack, will you ever grow up?

JACK. Perhaps with your help; but about our friend Stephen ——

JANET. He wants to marry me.

JACK. That's nothing, so do I and so do several others, Frank Bell for one.

JANET. Jack Howard, if you wish to continue on my list of friends, do not class Mr. Bell with yourself.

JACK. Does Bell suffer by comparison?

JANET. Decidedly, with you for a standard.

JACK. This way out, please. (*Leads himself by coat lapel*) But, seriously, Janet, you know I care a great deal for you.

JANET. And I am very fond of you, as a friend. You do not love me —

JACK (*interrupting*). Oh, yes I *do*.

JANET. Hush, you silly boy, you do nothing of the sort. You thought at one time that I inspired the *Grande Passion* in you, but you have outgrown that. The day you met Anne Pennington I was cast into the discard.

JACK. *Janet!*

JANET. You know I am right, and that is why you and I are friends. If you had persisted in making love to me you would have been handed your passports long ago.

JACK (*in fine fury*). Janet, you are utterly heartless; if I have made a fool of myself about you it is your own fault.

JANET (*resignedly*). As you will; we women must always bear the blame.

JACK (*hotly*). Why did you ask me to come here? You intimated that I could help you to rid yourself of undesirable attentions and I thought —

JANET. What?

JACK. That, that—perhaps you were going to accept me in his presence and —

JANET. Stop! Now I know you have not *started* growing up.

JACK. I—I —

JANET. *Listen!* I am going to explain the situation to you, brutally, since you prefer to have it so.

JACK. Go on; but I warn you, I must have the truth.

JANET. You will get it. Sit down and stop walking up and down like a caged lion. (JACK *sits suddenly*) I met Stephen Purceval over a year ago on a ranch in Nevada where I was stopping; he was the superintendent. Having been ordered by my physician to take a

complete rest, I selected this ranch. There were few to engage the interest of a woman accustomed to the usages of polite society, but Stephen interested me. He had some education, but had never been out in the world, *our* world; however, his personality amused me. We became good friends and saw much of each other; we rode and tramped together and finally ——

JACK. He made a fool of himself.

JANET. No, he did not; he cared for me sincerely and told me so.

JACK. Ah! *You* made a fool of him.

JANET. Wrong again, Jack; no one will ever make a fool of Mr. Purceval. He grew very fond of me, and I let him go on.

JACK. Because his personality amused you?

JANET. Perhaps—but, at any rate, I found I could not bring myself to dismiss him,—and I came away.

JACK. Poor devil!

JANET. He asked me to write to him—to answer his letters; I promised to do so ——

JACK. And you did?

JANET. Occasionally. He wrote often and finally proposed.

JACK. What then?

JANET. I did not answer directly. I said I would answer when I saw him.

JACK. Thinking he would never have money enough for his fare to New York?

JANET. I hardly know what I thought. Yesterday, however, he wrote me from this hotel. I was frantic; I could not let him come to my home; my people would never approve of him, and, beside ——

JACK (*interrupting*). You had been playing with him and naturally ——

JANET. There was another reason.

JACK. I don't get you.

JANET. I am engaged to Frank Bell.

JACK (*slowly*). You are engaged to Frank Bell?

JANET. Yes. So don't you see ——

JACK (*furiously*). I do see *now*. I see I am a damned fool for having lent myself to this scheme.

JANET. Jack, you are forgetting yourself.

JACK. No, I am just beginning to remember myself; and I am going to get out of this as soon as I can. (*Starts toward D. C.*)

JANET. And leave me here alone with this man? Listen, Jack, I want you to stay to help me out of this mess.

JACK (*going*). Not I. You have made the mess and you must get out of it. There must be some good women somewhere, and I am going to find one. I owe you thanks that you did not accept me.

JANET (*sarcastically*). Perhaps you have already found her—Anne Pennington, for instance?

JACK. Miss Cowdrey, please do not class Miss Pennington with yourself; she would certainly not glory over my scalp. She is so good that a woman of your confessed disposition should not mention her name.

JANET (*alarmed*). Jack, do not leave me; my reputation would be ruined if it became known that I met this man here—alone.

JACK. Pardon me, Miss Cowdrey, you are thinking only of your *reputation*, not your character. Good-night. (*Goes to D. C., meets STEVE, who ENTERS*)

STEVE (*coming in hurriedly, sees JACK*). I beg your pardon, I was expecting —

JANET (*rushing UP*). Oh, Mr. Purceval, this is my friend, Mr. Howard.

STEVE (*extending hand cordially*). Pleased to know you, Mr. Howard. (JACK *takes hand coldly*) My dear Janet! (*Goes eagerly to her; she shakes his hand, gently pushing him away*)

JACK (*haughtily*). Mr. Purceval, I believe I have performed my function, that of chaperone, so I will bid you *good evening*. (*Bows to STEVE, disregarding his extended hand; bows coldly to JANET*) [EXIT D. C.]

STEVE (*puzzled, looking after JACK*). Janet, what did that young fellow mean?

JANET (*going up to him; he tries to embrace her; she eludes him*). Stephen, Mr. Howard came here with me because I could not come alone, now could I?

STEVE. Certainly not; in fact, I could not understand why you came here at all. I wanted to go to you.

JANET. Yes, yes, I know. (*STEVE tries to embrace her; she backs away*) No, Stephen, you know the door is open, and by your orders.

STEVE (*going toward door*). Then I'll close it.

JANET. No, please don't. We can talk quite as well with it open. (*Looks fearfully about*) Won't you sit down? (*She sits*)

STEVE (*looking gloomily and seating himself near her*). All right, sweetheart, just as you say. You know you can't blame me for wanting to hug you just once, after all this time.

JANET. I don't blame you; I only blame myself.

STEVE (*reaching for her hand; she cautiously withdraws it*). What do you blame yourself for, dear?

JANET. I am not what you think me. You do not know —

STEVE. I know that I love you, that I have had you in my mind always since you went away. Your letters have been the one cheering thing in my life; I know —

JANET (*interrupting*). Don't, please don't.

STEVE (*bewildered*). Why shouldn't I say these things to my promised wife? I should be a —

JANET (*interrupting in mock misery*). Stephen, you do not understand; I am not your promised wife.

STEVE (*dazed*). Not my — My God, Janet, what do you mean? Didn't you say in your letter that you would answer my proposal when we met? Isn't that the same as a promise? Haven't I come all the way here to ask you, and now you say — Oh, I see; you must excuse me; I haven't gone about this in the right way; a letter is one thing, but talking straight from the shoulder is another. Now I see how it is—a girl wants a man to *spea*k right out, doesn't she? Well, sweetheart, I'm here to ask you face to face. (*Pauses, looks toward*

door) Can't I close that door? (JANET *dissents*) I'm here, dear, to ask you —

JANET (*stopping him*). Please listen, Steve. You must not ask me; I am not able. (*Aside*) Oh, what shall I say? (*To STEVE*) Steve, my people are obdurate; they will never permit our engagement —

STEVE. Now, don't worry, my girl; I know your people think I am poor and won't be able to provide for you properly, but I'll fool 'em. I haven't said a word to you, but I am far away from being a poor man. See here. (*Goes to dresser; hurriedly takes out papers*) Here they are, darling; deeds to properties, all good and all free and clear. (*Goes to JANET and tries to show papers. She waves him away; he looks dumbfounded*)

JANET. Steve, I see you *will not* comprehend. My people would never consent, no matter how rich you were.

STEVE (*forcibly*). What do I care for your people? It is you I want, and I am well able to take care of you; you shall have everything you want.

JANET (*aside, worried*). Will this man never understand? (*Aloud*) Steve, it cannot be.

STEVE. Janet, listen. I've just got to have you; I'll do everything to make you happy, even to living in New York, if you want to. (*Tries again to embrace her*)

JANET (*jumping up and away*). Steve Purceval, I have said I cannot marry you, and I mean it. This has all been a misunderstanding; I did not promise to be your wife; you have taken my friendly interest in you seriously. I admired you as a friend, but as a *husband* you are impossible. I am the affianced wife of another.

STEVE (*looking at her, dazed*). Promised to another, and you didn't mean what you said to me?

JANET. You misunderstood me, that was all.

STEVE (*speaking slowly, as if not fully comprehending*). Oh, that was all, was it? I didn't understand. I guess you're right; I've been pretty thick. I was good enough for a stop-gap and for pastime, that's it, *past-*

time; to while away your lonely hours. Oh, I understand now; you're like all of this big cursed camp; all show, all tinsel, all —— (*Scatters papers about savagely*)

JANET (*imploring*). Steve, listen ——

STEVE. Don't say another word; about now I think you have said enough. (*Glancing toward D. C.*) I knew that open door would come in handy. Will you please use it before I fully realize how utterly unworthy you are? (*Pointing to D. C.* JANET *slinks out abashed.* STEVE *stands dazed, looking down.* Finally turns slowly toward door, walks over and closes it; walks DOWN, thinking. Business. Looks about room; slowly picks up papers and bunches them) Huh, I guess I need a governess to take care of me. I surely am several kinds of a fool. (*Flings papers from him*) But I did think she was on the level. She sure did play the game well. (*Stands thinking*) God! I'm disappointed; and now she's gone—gone. Oh, hell! what's the use? (*Goes to 'phone*) Hello, send up a bottle of Scotch whiskey and get it here quick. (*Hangs up*) Funny I didn't see through her game. But maybe it wasn't a game; maybe it's all because I took too much for granted. (*Thinks*) No, that don't explain it; she just naturally played me for a sucker. Well, that's what I was, all right. I guess any good-looking woman with a hook, a line and a piece of lace, could have turned the trick. And I thought I knew New York; oh, yes, you blithering idiot, you know New York about as well as an incubator-hatched chicken knows Latin. (*Knock at D. C.*) Come in. (ENTER BELL-BOY *with tray, bottle, glasses, etc.* STEVE *turns to him*) Set it down. (BOY *does so and stands as if waiting for tip*)

BOY. Did you forget anything, sir?

STEVE (*suddenly confronting him*). I've forgotten more than you'll ever know.

BOY (*hastily backing away*). All right, sir; yes, sir; I only thought ——

STEVE (*savagely*). You thought! Say, kid, I thought

I thought once, but I found out that I didn't, and maybe it's the same way with you.

BOY (*retiring*). Yes, sir, maybe it is. (*Aside*) He's a nut.

STEVE. Wait a minute; get me time-tables on the Pennsylvania, all the way to God's country.

BOY. Are you going to Atlantic City, boss?

STEVE. *Atlantic City?* Say, don't get fresh with me; I'm in no mood for it. I'm going back to Nevada, and I want to get there as soon as I can.

BOY (*about to leave*). Ah, now I get your drift, Mister; you don't care for the white lights, the cabarays and all that stuff——

STEVE. Now you're talking. (*Turns away*)

BOY (*shaking his head*). Gee! and they say he's got money. (*Tapping head*) Nobody home. [EXIT D. C.]

STEVE (*goes to table, draws cork from bottle and pours drink; raises glass part way to lips; looks into it*). So, my old friend Scotch, you've come back to help me to forget myself; now, that's very kind of you, but I believe I finally dispensed with your services a long while ago. Who sent for you? Oh, *I* did. That's right, *I* did, but that was when a woman had just informed me that I was a fool and I believed her. Since then I've been thinking; she was only partly right. I am not such a fool as she and I thought, and I don't want any of *your* assistance. (*Flings glass, then bottle, into waste-basket. Laughs*) Say, I came near playing into her hand, didn't I? (*Straightening up*) Now I've got my second wind, and I guess I'll live. I think my temperature has fallen a little, so by the time those time-tables get here, I'll be able to sit up and have my bed made. And then I'll beat it out there where folks do and say things on the square. I hope I can start to-night. (*Rubs hand over chin*) That white-coated Baron down stairs made a bum job of this shave; if our ranch barber did a job like this he'd be run off the place. (*Takes off watch and lays it on dresser; removes coat, throwing it on chair*) Well, thank goodness, I can scrape my own face to my liking.

(Takes off collar and tie, looking into mirror) You poor boob, to ever put on those fool clothes after you'd shook 'em once. My second breaking into society was not a howling success; I don't think I will make a third attempt. *(Petulantly)* Why don't that boy come with those time-tables? I'll bet they had to send over to the depot for them. Well, I will hear him when he comes. *(Goes toward D. L. Stops, musing)* Steve Purceval, you are sure some jack-ass. [EXIT D. L.]

D. C. *is opened cautiously.* ENTER ANNE. *Looks about room.*

ANNE. This is the room, number 518. *(Closes door. Starts across stage. Knock at D. C. ANNE goes to door and opens it, disclosing BOY, who stares in astonishment)*

BOY *(handing time-tables to ANNE)*. Here's the dope Mr. S. P. wanted. *(Aside)* A peach! *(Admiring ANNE)*

ANNE *(taking tables and coming DOWN)*. Father must expect to take a long trip. *(Lays tables on table; busies herself about room)*

BOY. Oh, Papa. She ain't no daughter of his'n; that's only a blind. *(Stands admiring her)*

ANNE. That will be all; oh, wait. *(Looks in her hand-bag; produces coin and hands it to BOY)*

BOY. Thankee, Miss. *(Aside)* Oh, joy, S. P. must be running a harem. Well, she ain't a tight-wad like he is. [EXIT hurriedly D. C.]

ANNE *(looking about)*. Now what am I to take? *(Takes note from bag. Reads)* "Go to the McLaren and get some papers you will find on my bureau in Room 518." *(Goes to dresser)* I don't find anything here. *(Looks about; discovers papers on floor)* Oh, there they are. *(Stoops and picks them up)* Oh, daddy, daddy, you are dreadfully careless. *(Holds papers in one hand)* Now what else was there? *(Reads note)* "Take my bag and put them and any other articles you think I will need into it, and meet me at the Penn. depot."

I am leaving for Washington on the ten o'clock train. I will be at the (*Reads in silence, ending with*) Dad." (*Musing*) I wonder what else I should take. (*Gets bag, puts in papers, sees hair brushes, comb, etc., on dresser*) There are his brushes and his watch and fob. Now isn't that careless of him? (*Looks at brushes*) S. P.; these are surely his. (*Puts them into bag; takes up watch*) Strange, I don't remember the monogram on daddy's watch; wonder if it's new. (*Lays watch on dresser and opens hand-bag*) I won't put that in the bag. Oh, I am forgetting the time-tables. (*Turns to go to table; as she does so, knocks over chair; picks it up. Takes up time-tables and returns to dresser*)

ENTER STEVE D. L. *unseen by ANNE; he starts on seeing her and pauses at door. ANNE puts tables in bag then takes watch and fob and places them in hand-bag. STEVE tip-toes to D. C. and locks it, putting key in pocket. ANNE looks DOWN stage, away from STEVE; concludes she has everything, closes bag and turns toward D. C. STEVE stands eyeing her at L. of D. C. ANNE discovers STEVE.*

ANNE (*starting violently*). Oh!

STEVE (*deliberately*). Are you always as cool as this?

ANNE (*frightened*). Wh-what are you doing here?

STEVE. Very good, *very good*, indeed. I was about to ask the same question.

ANNE (*very frightened*). What do you mean, sir?

STEVE (*laughing derisively*). Good work, young woman, but not exactly necessary.

ANNE (*sparring*). You have made a mistake, sir; this room —

STEVE (*interrupting*). Is mine, and I should like to know why you are here, though I think I can guess. (*Pointing to his bag, which she is carrying*)

ANNE (*haughtily, going to D. C.*). You are insolent, and I shall have you punished. (*Tries door; finds it locked*)

STEVE (*tauntingly*). Bravo, little Miss Spitfire, but the door is locked and the key is in my pocket. Now tell me ——

ANNE (*apprehensively, interrupting*). Unlock that door. How dare you?

STEVE. Sorry, very sorry, but I cannot comply with your request; that is, not just at present. My first impulse was to turn you over to the police, but on second thought I have concluded to have a little talk with you.

ANNE. Again, sir, I command you to unlock the door; if you do so I will leave at once and say nothing about your behavior to the authorities.

STEVE (*applaudingly*). Fine; and if I don't?

ANNE (*defiantly*). I shall scream and alarm the house.

STEVE (*thoughtfully*). I wouldn't do that; it would be unpleasant for both of us. I can't just see why you have elected to play the game this way, but I know you New Yorkers have a way all your own, so we will let it go at that. I have read of your kind, and I have seen a few movies that featured members of your profession ——

ANNE. My profession; what do you mean? (*Partly comprehending, frightened*) Oh, sir, please let me go!

STEVE. Not yet. You at least owe me an explanation. I find you in my room, packing up and about to decamp with my property.

ANNE. Your room? Your property?

STEVE (*quietly*). Exactly. I admire your nerve, girl, I most assuredly do. You certainly took chances, but ——

ANNE (*thoroughly comprehending*). You say this is your room?

STEVE. Uh huh.

ANNE. Why, I thought it was ——

STEVE (*deprecatingly*). Don't, please don't; it won't do any good. When one is doing this sort of work and gets caught, the best way is to tell the truth. Don't say you made a mistake in the room or anything like that,

it is so hackneyed that one is likely to be peeved. If you had by any chance made a mistake in the room, why should you be packing up articles so obviously masculine?

ANNE. Because my father ——

STEVE (*interrupting*). Ah, that is better; you are beginning to get your scenario into workable shape. (*Places chair*) Won't you sit down?

ANNE. I will not; I decidedly prefer to stand. (*Spoken angrily*)

STEVE (*sternly*). And I prefer that you be seated. (*Indicates chair. ANNE looks apprehensively at him and sits suddenly*) Someone has said that one listens better seated; and, as I said, I want to talk to you.

ANNE (*near to tears*). Oh, won't you, please?

STEVE. Now, don't be afraid; I will not hurt you, and perhaps you can convince me that I should not have you arrested.

ANNE (*half rising; frightened*). Arrested!

STEVE. It happens sometimes, doesn't it?

ANNE. Yes—but ——

STEVE. Then again it doesn't. Now listen to me. The excuse about your father was only fair, and I must have a better one. You know that you have committed a prison offense, and I want to get at the reason. And, mark me, I want the truth. You were not mistaken in the articles you sought to take, for they are monogrammed plainly, as I will show you. (*Takes brushes from bag, showing backs, then reaches for hand-bag on table; ANNE removes it*) Your hand-bag, please. (*ANNE finally gives it to him. STEVE shows monogram on watch, putting it in his pocket*)

ANNE (*looking understandingly*). Will you please tell me your name?

STEVE. Most assuredly; it is Stephen Purceval, as you probably already know, since you seem otherwise so well informed. (*Takes bag UP stage*)

ANNE (*aside, understanding*). Stephen Purceval, S. P.—oh, what a horrible mistake.

STEVE (*looking at her earnestly*). Well, what have you to say?

ANNE. What are you going to do with me?

STEVE. I haven't quite decided. This is the first time I have had the privilege of meeting a woman of your kind. (*ANNE winces*) You will excuse me for being brutal. I have met cattle and horse thieves, gamblers and several of the masculine varieties, but a woman who — Well, you're a new one to me.

ANNE (*in great distress*). Oh, sir, you are terribly mistaken.

STEVE. I hope I am, God knows. (*Looks sharply at her*) You have a good look about you; I saw that at once, and that is the reason I want to know all about you. I am going to try an experiment; if it succeeds, all's well; if it fails, well, it will not be the first time I have found that I had much to learn about women. (*Looks intently at her*) Why is it that women as good-looking as you are will — Wait a minute (*Abruptly turns*)

[EXIT D. L.]

ANNE (*jumping up, goes toward D. C. then turns front*). It is no use; he has the key. Oh, daddy, why did you send me here? This is a dreadful experience, but—I am not a bit frightened *now*, and this man—this Stephen Purceval, interests me tremendously. (*Hears STEVE returning, sits suddenly as before*)

RE-ENTER STEVE D. L. *with wash-cloth and towel. He goes to ANNE, grasping her chin, raises her face and proceeds to wash it. She struggles fiercely, catching his wrists, but finally yields.*

STEVE (*looking at wash-cloth; then joyously*). That's fine! I owe you an apology. Your complexion is the only *real* thing I have found in New York so far. I passed hundreds of painted faces this afternoon. (*Hands towel to her*) I think you can dry your face better than I. (*Goes UP stage. ANNE dries face, smiling covertly*) Have you always lived in New York?

A Bad Beginning

ANNE. Not always, but most of the time. I spend the summer at Narragansett Pier or Bar Harbor usually.

STEVE. I believe those are summer resorts?

ANNE. Yes —

STEVE. I suppose you find it most profitable at such places?

ANNE (*appealingly*). Mr. Purceval, you wrong me. I don't suppose you will believe me, but I have never done anything like this before.

STEVE. Is that the truth?

ANNE. Yes, *indeed*.

STEVE. How much money do you need?

ANNE (*startled*). Money?

STEVE. Yes; you're in some serious difficulty, aren't you?

ANNE (*looking squarely but mischievously at him*). I need—two thousand dollars.

STEVE (*whistles*). That is quite a bunch of money, but will it make everything all right with you?

ANNE. It would do a great deal of good; but I must tell you, I want it for others.

STEVE. For others? Are you in the power of someone? I would not give a cent if I thought it was to be used for "hush money" or anything of that sort. Besides, I haven't that amount in cash.

ANNE. Mr. Purceval, I give you my word, no part of the money will go for improper purposes, but for the care of those to whom I and all of us are deeply indebted. I cannot tell you more now, but I do ask you to trust me. You think me a thief, and I admit the appearances are against me, but some day, perhaps, you will believe me worthy.

STEVE (*sitting opposite her*). Look at me. (*She does so; he studies her intently; rises and goes to bag*) All right, I'll take a chance. (*Takes fountain-pen and check-book from bag*) I am going to give you a check for the amount you named. (*Comes DOWN to table, sits, writes; looks at her*) To whom shall I make it payable?

ANNE (*who has been watching him, amused*). To bearer.

STEVE. Why do you wish to hide your name?

ANNE. I have asked you to trust me.

STEVE (*with decision*). And I'll do it. My business judgment says I am doing a fool thing, but there is something within me that pleads for you. Here is the check. (*Hands it to her, rises abruptly and turns from table*)

ANNE (*looking at check, then rising and going to STEVE*). Mr. Purceval, you are a man! (*Seizes his hand impulsively*)

STEVE (*holding her hand and pressing it to his lips; then he drops it*). Don't! (*Aside*) You infernal fool, riding to a fall again and with—what?

ANNE (*going to him; placing her hand on his arm*). Mr. Purceval, I am going to tell you all about myself, else you will not believe in me, and I *do* want you to.

STEVE (*taking her by the shoulders and looking at her*). You're square; I just know it. God knows what your reasons are for being here, but I believe in you, and I won't let you tear your heart for me. What are you and who am I, that you should confess to me?

ANNE. But it is your right.

STEVE. No, it is not; and if it were, I wouldn't have it. Now I am going to tell *you* something. To-night in this room, I offered my hand and heart to a woman so unworthy that whatever you may have been, at any time, you are an angel by comparison. She flung them back at me with disdain, and that, too, after she had led me to think she cared for me. She is respected in society, I presume, and yet she plays fast and loose with the finest, noblest elements in man. Would you do that?

ANNE. I certainly would not; to my mind the love of an honest man is a priceless thing.

STEVE (*eagerly*). Do you believe in love at first sight?

ANNE (*demurely*). I don't know.

STEVE. What would you think of a man who asked you to marry him less than an hour after he met you?

ANNE. My imagination fails me; a woman in my position could scarcely think such a thing possible.

STEVE. Well, it is possible, and (*seizing her hand*) you are the woman. I don't know what you have been through, there is some good reason for it. I ask you plainly to marry me and go back to Nevada with me. I am sufficiently endowed with this world's goods to provide all the material comforts and I offer you the love and protection of a lonely man.

ANNE (*interrupting*). Mr. Purceval, you do not know what you are saying.

STEVE. Don't I? Well, you can bet I do; and, what is more, I sincerely and soberly mean every word of it.

ANNE. But there is another who ——

STEVE. You're not married?

ANNE. Goodness, no; but I cannot decide so serious a question as you ask without thought.

STEVE. Is there any other man?

ANNE. Yes, there is one to whom I take all my worries.

STEVE (*looks dejected and turns away*). I might have known.

ANNE. Now don't look so; I mean my father.

STEVE. Your father? (*Joyously*)

ANNE. Yes, the very same father I came here for.

STEVE. Then you are not ——

ANNE (*interrupting*). Yes, I am, I confess it. I know, for you have told me so; I am a thief. Now I must go, when you open the door; I fear my father will be very angry because of my not having met him long since. Will you open the door? (*Removes glove from right hand*)

STEVE. My dear —— Goodness, I don't even know your name ——

ANNE. It is Anne. Will you open the door? (*As she tries to put glove in hand-bag she drops it to the floor*)

STEVE. Anne, will you marry me?

ANNE. Stephen Purceval, I will give you my answer

after I have seen my father, and after he has seen you. I cannot say more, and now, good-night. (*Extends her hand. STEVE takes it and kisses it tenderly. STEVE goes to D. C., unlocks and opens it. Just before passing out ANNE drops note on floor, and smiles sweetly at STEVE*)

STEVE. To-morrow? You know I trust and believe in you.

ANNE. Certainly not later than to-morrow; good-night—Stephen.

[EXIT *hurriedly D. C. throwing a kiss to STEVE*

STEVE (*stands a moment looking after her, then turns slowly and goes DOWN*). Humph! Good-night, Stephen. (*Stands ruminating; sees glove on floor, picks it up and stands passing it tenderly through his hands. After STEVE goes DOWN, JACK comes into view in D. C. from L. He looks R. after ANNE, then into room; steps into room, closes door carefully and comes DOWN behind STEVE*)

JACK (*angrily*). You cur!

STEVE (*surprised, turns sharply*). Eh, what's that?

JACK (*hands clenched*). You heard what I said.

STEVE (*coolly*). Mebbe I did and mebbe I didn't.

JACK (*exasperated*). I said *you cur*, and I meant you.

STEVE. Yeh? Why is this thus?

JACK. You dirty sneak!

STEVE (*showing anger*). Say, Howard, I believe that's your name, you're using rather bad language; I don't like your manner, either. (*Throws glove on table*)

JACK (*taunting*). Oh, you don't? We break even, then.

STEVE (*menacing*). You get out of here, and get out quick.

JACK (*sullenly, but backing away*). You can't scare me. I came for an explanation of your conduct toward the lady who has just left, and —

STEVE (*cooling*). So that's your lay, is it? Well, well, are you the man she's promised to?

JACK. No; I wish I were. But I am her friend, and

I'd go to the devil for her. She has been in this room —

STEVE. *Great.* What a wonderful guesser you are, to be sure; you brought her in here, didn't you?

JACK (*puzzled*). Whom do you think I mean?

STEVE. My, but you have a short memory; Miss Cowdrey and you were both here when —

JACK (*interrupting*). I don't mean *her*, and you know I don't.

STEVE. Do you know what you are talking about? If you don't mean her, whom do you mean?

JACK. I mean Miss Pennington.

STEVE. Miss Pennington — (*Understanding*) You mean the young lady who just left this room?

JACK. Come now, none of that bunk; you know mighty well what —

STEVE (*interrupting*). You know that girl; who is she?

JACK. If you're sparring for time, I want to tell you it's useless. I'm desperate, and I'm going to know why you had Anne Pennington in this room, with the door locked, if I have to choke it out of you.

STEVE (*not noticing*). Anne Pennington! Has she a father?

JACK. Well, rather; and when Sherwood Pennington knows what I know, you will answer to him too. (*Picks up glove from table and commences playing with it, laughing sarcastically the while*)

STEVE (*aside*). Sherwood Pennington—S. P.—the same initials as mine. (*Turns to JACK as if to speak, then continues, aside*) Heavens, can this be a form of the badger game? I can't believe it of *her*—but again, she was in here—and—*stealing*. (*Turns and sees JACK playing with glove. He is furious, and going over to him, grabs glove*) Give me that glove. (*Then continues menacingly*) You talk of explanations; you're going to do some explaining to me right here and now. (*JACK struggles, but is forced to a chair and into it*) Now, if you don't want me to pound you to a jelly, talk and talk

fast. You came here with Janet Cowdrey and left peculiarly; you have been hanging around here trying doors and generally acting suspiciously; now you come blustering in here. Get down to brass tacks and don't try to fool with me, for I've had enough.

JACK (*trying to rise, but STEVE pushes him roughly back*). You'll get more before I'm through with you; you have compromised one of the finest girls in this city, and you'll pay.

STEVE. I'd ought to be used to paying by this time, but *you are going to tell me* who this Miss Pennington, as you call her, is, who you are and who her father is. Now start.

JACK (*looking puzzled*). Why, she is Miss ——

STEVE (*threatening*). *Cut that!* Who is she?

JACK. Why, she is the sweetest girl in ——

STEVE. Mebbe I think I know *that*. Do you know her?

JACK. Of course I know her. What do you think? And what's more, if she'll have me, I'm going to marry her.

STEVE. Well, she won't.

JACK. How do you know that?

STEVE. That's my business. (*Disturbed*) Say, young man, has she ever promised to marry you?

JACK. No—not exactly.

STEVE. Has she encouraged you in any way?

JACK. Well, I can't say that she has, not in *that* way.

STEVE. What do you mean by "*that way*"?

JACK. Oh, you know.

STEVE. I'm afraid I don't; however, you may be able to help me with a little information; what was she doing here?

JACK. You certainly are some "bull-shooter"; what was she doing here? *That* is exactly what I want to know.

STEVE. I can't tell you.

JACK. You mean you won't.

STEVE. No, I can't; I don't know.

JACK. A very likely story, indeed. (*Sarcastically*) What do you *suppose*?

STEVE. Frankly, Howard, I suppose she was a — (*Recollects, as he looks at glove he still holds*) No matter what I supposed. I want to know about her; all that you will tell me. I am mightily interested in her.

JACK (*sneering*). So it seems.

STEVE (*hotly*). Howard, I don't like your manner of speaking. (*Tucks glove in waistcoat pocket*)

JACK (*as hotly*). And I don't like your manner of *acting*. You say you are interested in her, and you don't know why she was here.

STEVE. That is the truth; but we are not getting anywhere. You seem to think you have a grievance against me, and maybe you have, but I want to play fair. I mean *that*. I had hoped to marry Miss Pennington.

JACK. That's nothing; so had I, and I still hope to.

STEVE (*startled*). Is that so?

JACK. Absolutely.

STEVE. And may I ask by what right?

JACK. Because I love her.

STEVE. That's only one-sided; does she love you?

JACK. I don't know. How do you stand?

STEVE. Have you ever spoken to her of love?

JACK. N-o.

STEVE. Then on what do you base your hope?

JACK. What right have you to ask that?

STEVE. Absolutely none; but as I said, I want to play fair. If you have a claim upon the lady, I'll quit right now; otherwise I am in the race, and I'll stay until I'm beaten or disqualified.

JACK. Is that a challenge?

STEVE. No, it is just a statement of fact. The lady is worth fighting for.

JACK. How about Miss Cowdrey?

STEVE. She isn't.

JACK. *You said it!* You seem to be able to shift your interest with alacrity.

STEVE. Not me. Miss Cowdrey attended to that; I

thought I had some speed, but she was too high-gearred for me, as she pointed out.

JACK. I knew about that; and she was equally considerate of me.

STEVE. What, were you in love with her too?

JACK. I thought so until she convinced me to the contrary.

STEVE. When was that?

JACK. A couple of hours ago.

STEVE. Then up to two hours since Miss Pennington was not the object of your affections?

JACK. But I have known Anne for a long time.

STEVE. That's where you beat me. Up to an hour ago I didn't know of her existence.

JACK. And you complain of lack of speed?

STEVE. Is that commendation or criticism?

JACK. I hardly know; you keep me guessing. I don't understand you.

STEVE (*going over and putting hand on his shoulder*). Howard, I like you. I think I understand *you*. Let me make a guess at the conditions surrounding your affaires d'amour. How about it?

JACK. Shoot.

STEVE. You have known Miss Cowdrey some time——

JACK. Oh, forget it.

STEVE. Just a moment, then we'll both forget it—and—her. You were in love with her, or thought you were; she fascinated you, and you were flattered because she allowed you to dance attendance upon her, to fetch and carry for her, and when she had gotten through with you, she consigned you to the scrap-pile. So far, how good?

JACK. *Good*, but *you* haven't anything on me in that respect.

STEVE. Exactly; so far we run neck and neck. Now we'll bury that little romance, inscribe "Requiescat in Pace" on its headstone, and proceed to the consideration of another romance—sadder, but wiser men.

JACK. You refer to Anne?

STEVE. You're on.

JACK. I must decline to discuss Miss Pennington with you.

STEVE. You've already done so, Howard. By the way, what is your first name?

JACK (*sullenly*). John.

STEVE. All right, I'll call you Jack; it sounds more neighborly, and you just call me Steve, will you?

JACK. Oh, I don't care; all I want to know from you is what Anne was doing in your company and by —

STEVE (*interrupting*). Just a moment, Jack, we're coming to that. (*Long pause*) Miss Pennington would scarcely thank us for talking about her, even though her family connections are not all that we could wish.

JACK. What have you against her family? It is one of the very best in New York.

STEVE (*appearing pleased, then assuming surprise*). You surprise me. One of the poor but proud old families, eh?

JACK. Proud, yes; but poor, no.

STEVE. So? I suppose, then, that Miss Pennington has abundant funds, enough to supply her needs?

JACK. Well, I have never heard of Anne being financially embarrassed.

STEVE. But she may have been?

JACK. I can't imagine such a thing. Her father is a millionaire of the multi variety.

STEVE. I was under the impression that she was not financially well off.

JACK. I wish I were equally "well off."

STEVE. What would you do?

JACK. I'd marry her so quick that it would take your breath away.

STEVE. So you think she would have no objections if you had plenty of money?

JACK. Money is a powerful argument with any girl.

STEVE. No doubt you have had experience enough to enable you to speak authoritatively; I doubt if Miss Pennington would sell herself to any one.

JACK. I didn't say she would; I feel that she would marry a man as poor as I if she loved him; and I'm some poor when it comes to money.

STEVE. How many years must pass, do you think, before you will be in a position to ask Miss Pennington, or any other girl, to marry you?

JACK. I don't know, Steve; that's the devil of it; I get only a thousand dollars a year, and raises don't come very fast.

STEVE. How old are you?

JACK. Nearly twenty.

STEVE (*with mock seriousness*). My, my, I don't wonder you are discouraged. An old man like you, and getting only a thousand a year; that's almost bad enough to drive one to drink or off to the Fiji Islands or something, isn't it?

JACK (*petulantly*). Oh, I've wanted to get away from here for a long time. I'd like to go into mining engineering out West, and I should have done it, too, if it hadn't been for —

STEVE (*interrupting*). Janet?

JACK (*mimicking*). No, not Janet!

STEVE. She was your inamorata up to a couple of hours ago, wasn't she?

JACK. You've got a lot to say.

STEVE. I ain't saying a word, am I?

JACK. Well, it wasn't she.

STEVE. And it wasn't Miss Anne either, was it?

JACK. I don't suppose it was, exactly.

STEVE. As a matter of fact, wasn't it the girls in general?

JACK (*desperately*). Oh, I don't know.

STEVE. What are you working at now?

JACK. I am with a brokerage concern.

STEVE. Um-m; and you would like to get into something where you could make blood, rather than suck it, like a leech?

JACK. Isn't the brokerage business perfectly honorable?

STEVE. That depends, I suppose, on the point of view. To me, it seems a lot like stealing the fruits of others' work. The broker produces nothing, yet he lives off the ones that do.

JACK. Do you know, Steve, that idea has struck me before?

STEVE. But not so hard that it hurt?

JACK. Yes, it has; it has hurt many times. I have wanted to get out and do *something*. Something worth while. But whenever I speak of it at home, my folks make such a row that I just drop the matter. Mater says, *her* father (who was a broker) did *something* in life —

STEVE (*aside*). Or somebody.

JACK. And dad has never had any business.

STEVE. How is that?

JACK. Well, he didn't need any; he had two fortunes willed to him.

STEVE. So? How is it that you are not lounging about, waiting *your* turn at those fortunes?

JACK. Oh, I couldn't stand that sort of an existence. I've seen too much to be content with that way of living.

STEVE. You spoke of taking up engineering. Have you had any training in that line?

JACK. I wouldn't call it training, but rather a little insight into it; a very little at that, but enough to make me want more.

STEVE. Then why haven't you gotten it?

JACK. My folks always tried to discourage me. Oh, I don't suppose *you* can understand. I just hadn't the necessary "pep" to strike out.

STEVE (*rising and going to him, hand on shoulder*). Yes, Jack, I *do* understand; my own early experiences were a heap like yours, only I didn't do anything for myself until it was well nigh too late; so late, in fact, that I had neither the time nor inclination to tackle a professional career. What I *have* gotten has been by hard work, often of a menial character. You are young, with

loads of time to get where you want to, and now's your chance to start, my boy. I can help you, and I will, if you will only help yourself.

JACK (*extending hand*). You will? (STEVE *takes his hand*) You really mean that?

STEVE. Try me. I will put you in touch with real live wires that will give you your opportunity. There will not be much compensation in the beginning, probably, barely enough for your necessary expenses—unless—your people will help you with some funds.

JACK. Nix on my people, Steve; if I can't make good without them I'll just throw up my mitts and go on as I am. (STEVE *looks pleased*) I should have broken loose before this, and *now* I'll be blamed if I don't do it. I want *your* help, for I know it will be *real* help.

STEVE. That's the stuff, boy. I'll boost you all I can, but I won't carry you a damned inch.

JACK. Thank you, old man, I can't start too soon.

STEVE. *Good!* As soon as it can be arranged you shall meet the people I have in mind, and that ought to be within the week. Meanwhile, plug along as you are and get the home folks to your way of thinking, if possible. You're going to make good, and they'll all be proud of you.

JACK. And—I know Anne will be pleased.

STEVE (*reflecting*). Undoubtedly—and perhaps—she will reward you—when you win.

JACK. I don't know how you mean that, but I can tell you one thing,—she would prefer you to me, no matter how far I made good. She has always been bully to me, but I'm a "kid" to her; I know it now. I'm sorry I spoke as I did about her being here with you. It was dirty. (STEVE *deprecates*) Yes, it was, and I'm ashamed of it. I know her well enough to make my suspicion inexcusable.

STEVE. Jack, you are the kind of stuff from which heroes are made. Some day you will find the girl you want, and who will want you. But, take my advice, don't try until you have gotten something spiritual and

material to offer her. Then you will make a good job of it.

JACK. I'll remember your words, Steve, and heed them. But, say, don't ever tell Anne what I did, will you?

STEVE (*ruminating*). I may never have an opportunity. After what has happened, I doubt if I have the nerve to go on.

JACK. Oh, your nerve will hold good enough; I saw her look at you as she left, and a look like that, in my direction, would land me beside her at the altar, in spite of everything. And now I'm going; I'll count the minutes until I get started on the new road. You won't mind if I run in here to see you once in a while, will you? You'll be here, I suppose?

STEVE. I don't know, Jack, that depends. But you can always reach me should it be necessary. Give me your address, and I will get in touch with you at the earliest possible moment.

JACK (*taking out and handing card*). But where can I get you if you leave here?

STEVE. Oh, that's so; in care of Frank H. Bell, 120 Broadway, Room 480.

JACK (*having written address, looks at STEVE, musing*). Say, Steve, is this the Frank Bell that Janet is engaged to?

STEVE. Janet! Frank! You've hit it! It's as clear as day now. She threw me over for —

JACK (*interrupting*). Me?—Us, you mean.

STEVE. That's right. Us. I accept the amendment. She threw us over for my old chum Bell; he said something about Janet, but I was thinking of other things and didn't catch on. Poor old Frank, I'm sorry for him.

JACK. Poor old scout; too bad he doesn't slip away to the Sahara Desert. I guess he's signed up for a little world war of his own, eh?

STEVE. A real what Sherman said it was, Jack. (*Loud knock* D. C. STEVE *hastily gathers up coat, etc.,*

and runs to D. L.) Open the door, Jack, while I get some clothes on. [EXIT D. L.]

JACK (*opens door, disclosing ANNE and BELL, who ENTER. Aside*). Well, I'll be ——

ANNE (*extending hand to JACK*). This is certainly a surprise, Jack. I didn't know you were acquainted with Mr. Purceval.

JACK (*blurting out*). That's not very strange, since you've only known him —— (*Recollects and stammers*)

ANNE. What were you saying?

JACK. Oh, nothing. I understood you—had only met—Steve, I mean Mr. Purceval, recently. (*BELL looks surprised*)

ANNE (*graciously*). That is quite right, Jack, only about an hour ago.

JACK (*aside*). That's what Steve said. (*Aloud—nervously*) Exactly, about an hour ago.

BELL. Why, Miss Pennington, I don't understand this. I did not know you were acquainted with Stephen. (*JACK looks curiously at both*)

ANNE. I know that, Mr. Bell; that is why I asked permission to accompany you here, when father asked you to see Mr. Purceval, if possible, to-night. I wanted you to identify me and isn't it splendid, Jack is here, too? (*Both BELL and JACK look hopelessly puzzled*) Mr. Purceval will surely believe his old friends.

JACK. Who, me? Old friend, oh, *boy!*

BELL. But you never said ——

ANNE. I know. I must explain. I said nothing, for I didn't know whether we would see Mr. Purceval. (*Looks about*) He isn't here anyway.

JACK (*motions silence*). Sh, sh, he's in there (*Points to L.*) making himself look pretty.

ANNE. That is where he came from before.

BELL. Before?

ANNE. Yes. When I was here before, he came out of that door, and he certainly gave me a fright. You see, I was stealing his watch.

BELL and JACK. *His watch!*

ANNE. Yes, and his fob and hair-brushes and bag and, oh, everything.

JACK. Anne, you're raving; you're not well; you're ——

BELL (*trying to take her arm*). You're going right home.

ANNE. I am not. (*Starting back*) I am going to stay right here until Stephen Purceval knows what a vile creature I am.

JACK (*coaxing*). Now, Anne, come, be a good little girl and go home. (*To BELL*) Let us humor her. (*To ANNE*) You shall come down here to-morrow and let Stephen see, whatever you wish to be—and—and——

ANNE. No, indeed, there is no time like the present. (*Sees note she dropped on the floor, pounces upon it*) See, see here it is; the proof of my guilt. (*Hands note to BELL*) Read it, then curse me if you will. (*Mock tragedy. BELL takes letter with hesitation. JACK regards her with concern*)

BELL (*reading furtively*). "Go to the McLaren and get some papers you will find on my bureau in Room 518——"

ANNE (*interrupting*). That's it, Room 518; you read it the same as I. (*Goes to D. C.; opens it; pointing to number*) And behold, *this* is No. 518!

BELL. Yes, yes, but what does ——

ANNE (*interrupting*). Proceed—read on. (*JACK looks over BELL's shoulder*)

BELL (*reading*). "Take my bag and put them and any other articles you may think I need into it and meet me at the Penn. depot"——

ANNE. There, you see, there is the proof.

JACK. Proof of what?

ANNE (*dramatically*). That I am—oh, how shall I say it, that I am a *thief*. (*As ANNE makes this speech STEVE ENTERS from D. L. He stands dumbfounded at door*)

BELL. A thief?

JACK. A thief?

ANNE (*espies STEVE*). Yes, a thief. (*To BELL*) Look at the signature on that note.

BELL (*doing so*). There is only the word "Dad."

ANNE. Whom do you think wrote it?

BELL. Why, this is all in your father's hand, I should say.

JACK. Blame me, if I can see what this is all about.

ANNE. Jack, you are positively dull. I came here as directed by my esteemed parent and was told to go right up; I did. The door was unlocked and I entered. I proceeded to do as I had been bidden, when *lo*, a man was standing there. (*Points to D. L. STEVE stands eagerly listening*) *That man!* He had locked the door and I was trapped—*trapped!*

STEVE (*coming forward*). Yes trapped, and—I accused her of being a thief.

ANNE. Which was perfectly natural, since I had his watch, etcetera, and was preparing to decamp with same. Neither of us is to blame if the number of father's room was 318. (*Looks about humorously*)

JACK (*dancing about*). Oh boy, this is some movie.

STEVE. Shut up, Jack, *this* is a tragedy.

BELL. If you will pardon me, I think it is farce, pure and simple.

ANNE. *Mr. Purceval* is right, to *us* it was tragedy sure enough—for a little while.

JACK. And then, and then? (*Hums "Here comes the bride"*)

ANNE (*shocked*). Jack Howard, it is far past your bedtime; go home at once.

BELL (*looking from STEVE to ANNE*). And so this is how you two met; you have not been formally introduced?

JACK. Too late, Mr. Bell (*Mock rhetoric*), two souls tried in the fires of —

STEVE (*menacing*). What did I tell you, Jack?

JACK. Oh, come now, both of you.

BELL. This is a most extraordinary experience.

ANNE (*roguishly*). Simply terrible!

STEVE. But one for which I shall be very thankful,— if Miss Pennington can find it in her heart to forgive me.

ANNE. What have I to forgive? This has been an experience that I would not have missed for worlds. I have had a lesson in magnanimity to-night, that is sublime. (*Looks pointedly at STEVE*)

BELL. I am so glad you two are friends.

JACK. You mean we three.

STEVE. Why not make it *we four*?

ANNE. That's it, we should call ourselves the McLaren quartette.

BELL (*laughing*). Very good, Miss Pennington, but we are forgetting your father's instructions.

ANNE (*to STEVE*). Oh, yes, father wanted Mr. Bell to ask you to meet him in Washington to-morrow afternoon. Mr. Bell knows the particulars of the proposition.

BELL. Mr. Pennington thinks well of your mine, Steve, and wants to meet you to go into the matter. (*STEVE bows*) Now I propose that we have a bite to eat before we take Miss Pennington home. What do you say?

STEVE. That suits me all right.

ANNE (*turning*). Suppose we go then.

JACK. Fine, come on. (*All start toward D. C.* ANNE C., STEVE R., BELL L., JACK R. *front*)

ENTER JANET D. C., *brusquely*.

BELL (*surprised*). Janet! (*STEVE steps partly out of sight beside bureau*)

ANNE (*stepping forward and extending hand cordially*). This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Cowdrey.

JANET (*not noticing hand*). I can readily believe that, Miss Pennington. (*To BELL*) So *this* is the reason you did not keep your appointment with me, is it?

BELL. Why, Janet, I did not think it would matter to you and there was some business that —

JANET (*interrupting, sarcastically*). *Business*, huh— keeps you late, doesn't it?

ANNE (*angrily*). Miss Cowdrey, I am obliged to take cognizance of your manner. Mr. Bell is *here* on business and your implied doubt, in the circumstances, is not pleasant.

JANET. *Indeed?* Well, Miss Pennington, if my remarks strike home, you may apply them as you see fit.

JACK (*coming forward*). Say, Janet, you are going too far, I ——

BELL (*interrupting, with dignity*). I can handle this matter without assistance.

JACK (*blurting out*). Then *you* are better equipped than she was (*Pointing to JANET*) earlier in the evening and in this same room.

JANET (*starting and glancing about. Aside*). I didn't recognize the room.

BELL (*puzzled*). In this room, what does he mean, Janet?

STEVE (*stepping forward and looking at JANET, who starts violently upon seeing him. He looks meaningfully at ANNE*). Perhaps I can best explain the matter, Frank; Miss Cowdrey called here this evening to negotiate a transfer of certain obligations pertaining to the Janet mine. Mr. Howard accompanied her. I met Miss Cowdrey when she was in the West, and we invested in some of the same securities. (*Looks sharply at JANET and then at ANNE, who, understanding, nods approval*)

JANET (*assuming gaiety, looking furtively at ANNE*). Of course, that's it. Cannot you serious people take a joke?

JACK (*aside to STEVE and ANNE*). Can you beat that? (*They all exchange glances and smile*)

BELL (*laughing boisterously*). Come now, that's good; you gave us all quite a start. I never knew you had met Steve.

JANET. Oh, yes, Mr. Purceval was very kind to me and helped me greatly with advice about investments and so forth.

JACK (*aside, swaggering DOWN*). And so fifth—and so sixth ——

JANET (*coming to ANNE, who is seated R. of table*). I met Mr. Barnes on Broadway, and he said Frank was up here; so I ran up to ask him to see me home. (*ANNE looks coldly at her and slightly inclines her head*)

JACK (*to STEVE*). Barnes is another poor *simp* on her staff. (*STEVE nods*)

JANET (*conciliating*). I trust you will not take my remarks amiss, Miss Pennington, I really was only joking.

ANNE (*pointedly*). You need not explain your actions to me, Miss Cowdrey, and I am only interested in your remarks, in so far as they reflect upon me; then I shall require an accounting, I assure you. (*Turns away from her*)

BELL (*anxious to cover for JANET*). Now that we are all here, let's go down together and have a bite.

ANNE (*turning to BELL*). Thank you, Mr. Bell, but I think I will go directly home; Mr. Purceval and Jack will see that I don't get lost, won't you? (*Looking at both, who nod vigorously in the affirmative*)

STEVE (*in tone of dismissal*). I will meet you at the depot in the morning, Frank. What time does the train leave?

BELL. At nine. (*Going to ANNE and extending hand*) Good-night, Miss Pennington.

ANNE (*shaking his hand*). Good-night.

BELL (*shaking STEVE'S hand*). Good-night, old man, don't miss the train.

STEVE. Never fear, I'll be there.

BELL (*to JACK*). Good-night, Jack.

JACK. So long, Mr. Bell.

JANET (*with sweeping bow to all, graciously*). Good-night. (*OMNES bow but do not speak; JANET stalks haughtily out of D. C. while BELL waits courteously. He follows JANET out with humiliated expression*)

STEVE (*looking after them*). There goes the end of a life-time friendship. (*Walks DOWN L.*) Dear old chap, I'm sorry.

JACK. Yes, he is to be pitied; but maybe he'll escape.

ANNE. But how can he?

JACK. Steve, suppose he goes out West with me?

ANNE (*looking inquiringly at both*). Out West?

STEVE. I must tell you, Anne dear,—may I call you that?

ANNE (*demurely*). I should not have returned if—I were unwilling.

STEVE (*placing arm partly about her*). Bless you for that. I was about to tell you that Jack has concluded to abandon his present avocation and take a man's job at mining engineering out my way.

ANNE (*to STEVE*). Is that true? (*STEVE nods*) Yes? (*Then going to JACK*) Oh, you splendid boy! I am so proud of you. (*Patting his arm*)

JACK. Thank you, Anne. (*Aside*) Who ever heard of a "splendid boy"? I wonder if I won't ever grow up.

STEVE. Suppose we carry out that "bite" program that was proposed so long ago. (*ANNE nods assent*)

JACK (*grabbing hat and going up c.*). You'll have to excuse me; I'm going home and to bed.

ANNE (*stopping him*). Jack, you won't refuse me; to-night means so much to us, all three, that we should "break bread" together. I feel certain that Stephen also wants you to come.

STEVE. You bet I do; Jack here is some boy. (*To JACK*) You are our friend and the party would not be complete without you.

JACK. Oh, that's all right, but I know you two want to be alone and ——

STEVE (*playfully slapping him*). Shut up, Jack. (*Taking ANNE'S arm*) Come on, we won't get a table if we don't move.

JACK (*going*). Let me go and select the table; you elderly people can follow leisurely.

[EXIT *with a laugh* D. C.]

ANNE. Isn't he a splendid fellow, Stephen?

STEVE. He sure is.

ANNE (*roguishly*). Stephen, I have your check here. (*Points to hand-bag*)

STEVE. Have you, dear heart?

ANNE. Do you want it back?

STEVE. Surely not. What are you going to do with it?

ANNE. If it pleases you, it will go to the Red Cross; that was what I had in mind—while I was under suspicion.

STEVE (*shaking finger at her*). You are still under suspicion, in fact I *know* you will *steal*. So give the check for that noble cause and we will work together for it. (*Leads her D. C.*) And in that way we can partly atone for a bad beginning.

ANNE. All right, dear, I'll give up the check, but I'll keep the *rest* of my stealings. (*Smiling tenderly*)

STEVE (*to audience*). She called me *dear*. (ANNE *steps out D. C.*) One moment, please. (*Taking her glove from pocket, ANNE turns*) Your glove. (*Holding it high. She reaches for it. STEVE embraces and kisses her. ANNE runs off, STEVE following*)

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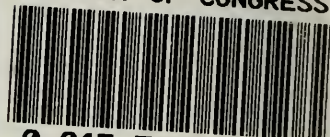
		Acts	Males	Females	Time
Arabian Nights	Farce	3	4	5	2¼h
Bundle of Matches	Comedy	2	1	7	1½h
Crawford's Claim	Drama	3	9	3	2¼h
Her Ladyship's Niece	Comedy	4	4	4	1½h
Just for Fun	"	3	2	4	2h
Men, Maids, Matchmakers	"	3	4	4	2h
Our Boys	"	3	6	4	2h
Puzzled Detective	Farce	3	5	3	1h
Three Hats	"	3	5	4	2h
Timothy Delano's Courtship	Comedy	2	2	3	1h
Up-to-Date Anne	"	2	2	3	1h
White Shawl	Farce	2	3	3	1½h
Fleeing Flyer	"	1	4	3	1¼h
From Punkin' Ridge	Drama	1	6	3	1¼h
Handy Solomon	Farce	1	2	2	20m
Hoosier School	"	1	5	5	30m
Kiss in the Dark	"	1	2	3	45m
Larry	"	1	4	4	45m
Love Birds' Matrimonial Agency	"	1	3	4	30m
Married Lovers	Comedy	1	2	4	45m
Ma's New Boarders	Farce	1	4	4	30m
Mrs. Forester's Crusade	"	1	1	2	30m
New Pastor	Sketch	1	2	2	30m
Relations	Farce	1	3	1	20m
Standing Room Only	Comedy	1	3	1	35m
Stormy Night	"	1	3	1	40m
Surprises	Farce	1	2	3	30m
Tangles	"	1	4	2	30m
Little Rogue Next Door	"	1	2	3	40m
'Till Three P. M.	"	1	2	1	20m
Train to Mauro	"	1	2	1	15m
When Women Rule	"	1	2	4	15m
Won by a Kodak	Comedy	1	2	3	50m
April Fools	Farce	1	3	0	30m
Fun in a Schoolroom	"	1	4	0	40m
Little Red Mare	"	1	3	0	35m
Manager's Trials	"	1	9	0	45m
Medica	"	1	7	0	35m
Mischievous Bob	Comedy	1	6	0	40m
Cheerful Companion	Dialogue	1	0	2	25m
Dolly's Double	"	1	1	1	20m
Drifted Apart	"	1	1	1	30m
Gentle Touch	"	1	1	1	30m
John's Emmy	"	1	1	1	20m
Point of View	"	1	1	1	20m
Professor's Truant Glove	"	1	1	1	20m
Belles of Blackville	Minstrel	1	0	any no.	2h
Sweet Family	Entertainment	1	0	8	1h
Conspirators	Comedy	2	0	12	40m
A Day and a Night	"	2	0	10	1h
Gertrude Mason, M.D.	Farce	1	0	7	30m
In Other People's Shoes	Comedy	1	0	8	50m
Maidens All Forlorn	"	3	0	6	1¼h
Mary Ann	"	1	0	5	30m
Romance of Phyllis	"	3	0	4	1¼h
Fuss vs. Feathers	Mock Trial	1	4	4	30m
Tanglefoot vs. Peruna	"	1	7	18	1½h
Great Libel Case	"	1	21	0	2h

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Irish Eden	Comedy	3	8	4	
Kidnapped Freshman	Farce	3	12	4	2¼h
Matrimonial Tiff	Farce	1	2	1	1h
Little Savage	Comedy	3	4	4	2h
Lodgers Taken In	"	3	6	4	2½h
Miss Mosher of Colorado	"	4	5	3	2h
Miss Neptune	"	2	3	8	1¼h
My Uncle from India	"	4	13	4	2½h
Never Again	Farce	3	7	5	2h
New England Folks	Drama	3	8	4	2¼h
Next Door	Comedy	3	5	4	2h
Oak Farm	Comedy	3	7	4	2½h
Riddles	"	3	3	3	1¼h
Rosebrook Farm	"	3	6	9	1¾h
Stubborn Motor Car	"	3	7	4	2½h
Too Many Husbands	Farce	2	8	4	2h
When a Man's Single	Comedy	3	4	4	2h
Where the Lane Turned	"	4	7	5	2h
After the Honeymoon	Farce	1	2	3	50m
Biscuits and Bills	Comedy	1	3	1	1¼h
Chance at Midnight	Drama	1	2	1	25m
Conquest of Helen	Comedy	1	3	2	1h
The Coward	Drama	1	5	2	30m
Sheriff of Tuckahoe	Western Sk.	1	3	1	1h
Bashful Mr. Bobbs	Comedy	3	4	7	2½h
Whose Widow	"	1	5	4	50m
Alice's Blighted Profes- sion	Sketch	1	0	8	50m
Regular Girls	Entertainment	1	0	any no.	1h
100% American	Comedy	1	0	15	1½h
Parlor Patriots	"	1	0	12	1h
Fads and Fancies	Sketch	1	0	17	1h
Mr. Loring's Aunts	Comedy	3	0	13	1¼h
My Son Arthur	"	1	2	8	¾h
Sewing Circle Meets	Entertainment	1	0	10	1¼h
Every Senior	Morality play	1	0	8	40m
Bride and Groom	Farce	3	5	5	2¼h
Last Chance	Comedy	2	2	12	1½h
Bubbles	"	3	4	3	1½h
Hurricane Wooing	"	3	4	3	1½h
Peggy's Predicament	"	1	0	5	½h
Found in a Closet	"	1	1	3	20m
Slacker (?) for the Cause	Sketch	1	3	1	20m
Baby Scott	Farce	3	5	4	2¼h
Billy's Bungalow	Comedy	3	5	4	2h
College Chums	"	3	9	3	2h
Delegates from Denver	Farce	2	3	10	¾h
Football Romance	Comedy	4	9	4	2½h
Held for Postage	Farce	2	4	3	1¼h
In the Absence of Susan	"	3	4	6	1½h
Transaction in Stocks	Comedy	1	4	1	45m
Aunt Dinah's Quilting Party	Entertainment	1	5	11	2h
Bachelor Maids' Reunion	"	1	2	any no.	1½h
In the Ferry House	"	1	15	11	1½h
Rustic Minstrel Show	"	1	any no.	any no.	1½h
Ye Village Skewl of Long Ago	"	2	any no.	any no.	2h
Rainbow Kimona	"	2	0	9	1½h
Rosemary	Comedy	4	0	14	1½h
Pharaoh's Knob	"	1	1	12	1h